



MEMORANDUM

September 16, 2009

TO: Planning Commission

THROUGH: David B. Levy, Chief of Long Range Planning and Redevelopment

FROM: Ann Wallas, Planner III, Long Range Planning

SUBJECT: **Montgomery County 2009 - 2011 Growth Policy –
Presentation to Planning Commission by Rollin Stanley, Montgomery
County Director of Planning, MNCPPC
September 23, 2009 at 7:00 p.m.**

On September 23, 2009, Planning Commission will receive a presentation on the draft Montgomery County 2009-2011 Growth Policy, entitled "reducing our footprint", from Montgomery County Planning staff of the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC-MC). The presentation will be from either Mr. Rollin Stanley, Director of Planning, or project staff. The memorandum provides a brief overview of the draft document, with a brief discussion of its relevance to Rockville.

The Planning Board approved the attached document on July 30, 2009, and referred it to the Montgomery County Council for review. As part of the process, Montgomery County Planning staff has offered to provide community briefings upon request. City staff requested this briefing,

What is the Montgomery County Growth Policy?

The Growth Policy, which has been known in previous versions as the Annual Growth Policy, (p.5 of Draft) "...sets the rules the Planning Board will use to consider subdivisions over the following two year period, in the context of the [County's] Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance. The APFO ensures that there is enough school and road capacity to accommodate new development." The Montgomery County Council adopts a new Growth Policy every other year – on odd-numbered years – after considering recommendations put forward by the Planning Board.

For the 2009 – 2011 Growth Policy, County Planning staff and the Board has taken a different approach. The draft document takes the position that, historically, (p. 6 of Draft) "the Policy has directed where growth will occur but it has often been in areas with

lower densities, where the road and school capacity exists. These are also the areas where basic services and transit do not exist.... As a result, residents of these areas travel longer distances through more densely settled areas to get to jobs, buy groceries, visit the doctor, mail a parcel, or bring their children to school or soccer. The pattern has contributed to an increase in the number of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by County residents.”

As a result of this point of view, the Planning Board draft, entitled “*reducing our footprint*”, attempts to establish a set of Smart Growth Criteria in the areas of schools and transportation, with the goal of encouraging compact mixed-use projects near transit, placing a greater emphasis on environmental management, community design and connectivity. The intention is to modify the operational mechanisms of the Growth Policy and APFO that the Planning Board believes to be leading, unintentionally, to sprawling development.

Specific policy changes that the Draft recommends in furtherance of these goals can be found on pages 10 and 11. They include (but are not limited to):

Transportation

- Allowing greater levels of traffic congestion than in the past where there is judged to be sufficient transit capacity; to encourage multi-modal mitigations;
- Allowing vested APF rights to be transferred into a Metro Station Policy Area from an adjacent Policy Area;
- For the White Flint area APF approval process, replacing the existing transportation tests with “public entities and funding mechanisms as recommended in the Draft Sector Plan.”

Schools

- Changing the School Facility Payment Threshold from 105% of projected program capacity to 110% at any school level by cluster;
- Maintaining the moratorium threshold at projected enrollment greater than 120% of projected program capacity at any school level by cluster;
- Applications completed 12 months prior to the implementation of a moratorium on residential subdivisions will be “grandfathered: and
- Allowing vested APF rights to be transferred within a school cluster.

What the 2009 Growth Policy means for the City of Rockville

A large part of the motivation for these changes is the ongoing planning processes for the Gaithersburg West and White Flint sectors, which are immediately adjacent to Rockville (Gaithersburg West), and within .5 miles of the city (White Flint). Both plans have been approved by the Planning Board and will be considered by the County Council in the near future.

The shift in focus towards mixed-use and compact development is similar to the approach that the City has taken in Town Center, with the new Zoning Ordinance, and in the principles that are guiding the emerging Rockville Pike plan. However, the White Flint and Gaithersburg West draft plans allow higher levels of density than does Rockville.

Both plans, if approved, would add significant development potential to their respective planning areas, but could potentially encounter obstacles if the County's Growth Policy and APFO would not permit development to occur. Both draft plans place emphasis on transit and other non-auto modes of transportation, and are being redefined as fully urban, rather than suburban. The changed thresholds proposed in the draft Growth Policy would permit more automobile traffic in those planning areas, but with a target of higher percentage of non-auto trips than would have been the case without these policy changes. Some of this additional traffic can be expected to affect Rockville, both in terms of overall congestion and, potentially, in the City's ability to absorb additional development in the context of Rockville's Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance.

The City staff does not object to the proposed changes in these implementation mechanisms per se. Indeed, the City may wish to consider similar modifications to our own APFO in order to retain our competitive advantage to assure that sufficient capacity remains for Rockville's growth and redevelopment. However, the City should ensure that the combination of densities proposed in the White Flint and Gaithersburg West plans, combined with these implementation mechanisms, do not overwhelm our infrastructure.

Schedule

The Montgomery County Planning Board approved the draft 2009 Growth Policy on July 30, 2009, and referred it to the Montgomery County Council.

The Montgomery County Council will conduct a Public Hearing on the 2009-2011 Growth Policy on September 22, 2009 at 7:30 p.m. The County Council usually holds the public record open for a short period after a Public Hearing. Staff will communicate this closing date when the County Council has decided.

The County Council's Planning, Housing and Economic Development (PHED) Committee have scheduled two work sessions, for October 6 and October 13, 2009, at 2:00 p.m.

The County Council is required to adopt the 2009-2011 Growth Policy by November 15, 2009.

More detailed information on the Growth Policy can be found at:

http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/research/growth_policy/growth_policy09/agp_growing_smarter.shtm

Attachment: Planning Board Draft 2009-2011 Growth Policy